

Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity
Hearing “Reauthorization of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act”
Opening Statement for Congresswoman Julia Carson
October 4, 2007

Thank you, Chairwoman Waters and Ranking Member Capito for holding this important hearing today. I know we share a deep interest in eradicating homelessness. I regret not being present today, but I am thankful Homeless Assistance programs are receiving the attention they so desperately deserve. Today’s hearing affirms that working to end homelessness is a mission taken very seriously by this Congress.

This past July marked the 20th Anniversary of the enactment of the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act and yet the tragedy of homelessness persists. More than three million individuals experience homelessness every year and over one million of those individuals are children. This is unacceptable in our prosperous nation. It is in this spirit that I introduced the Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2007, H.R. 840. The bill would reauthorize McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance programs which provide critical transitional housing, supportive services, emergency shelters and permanent housing.

The changes within H.R. 840 reflect the lessons we have learned since the last reauthorization of these programs in 1994. It addresses the concerns of diverse communities with distinct needs but one goal- to end homelessness. This bill would restore local level decision making on homeless priorities, increase the authorization of these programs and modify HUD’s definition of homelessness which is outdated and exclusive. H.R. 840 ensures more children and families receive homeless assistance by aligning HUD’s definition with the one used by the Department of Education, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Local providers know which housing priorities best address their unique needs, but currently, severely inadequate funding levels, restrictive definitions and inflexible requirements prevent them from implementing housing solutions that best suit those needs. Many of the witnesses today are local-level service providers and advocates who face these obstacles every day. H.R. 840 would diminish these hurdles.

My home state of Indiana includes urban, suburban and rural communities, each struggling with different homeless dilemmas. In my district, which is comprised of the city of Indianapolis, more than 15,000 individuals experience homelessness each year. In this urban setting, it may be best to target housing and services towards the homeless that live on the streets for long periods of time. In Jeffersonville, Indiana, however, there is a dramatically different picture of homelessness. Barb Anderson, a witness today, serves as the executive director of Haven House Services in this rural community where affordable housing is sparse and the homeless are less visible, often living in doubled-up situations with relatives or in overcrowded, substandard housing.

Under H.R. 840, both the Indianapolis and the Balance of Indiana Continuum of Care Boards would be able to set different, more effective priorities. Further, they would be able to address all homeless individuals, not just those who meet a narrow, federally mandated definition.

I would like to thank Congressman Geoff Davis for his hard work on H.R. 840 and all of the cosponsors of the bill. I am grateful that so many of my colleagues are invested in efforts to address homelessness. Congress has been disgracefully slow in recognizing and responding to the national crisis of homelessness and I am thrilled that we have the opportunity to shed light on this issue today. Thank you.